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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 4356
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3175
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9939
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RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0367
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2344
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 6868
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4726
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001531

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/17/2016

TAGS: PREL PTER PHUM PREF MOPS CE

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: NAVY AND AIR FORCE SINK LTTE WEAPONS
SHIP 100 MILES OFF EASTERN COAST; MUSLIMS HACKED TO DEATH

REF: A. COLOMBO 1483 AND PREVIOUS

1B. COLOMBO 1456
1C. COLOMBO 1449

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Classified By: Ambassador Robert O. Blake for reasons 1.4(b,d).

Security Forces Sink Tiger Weapons Ship

11. (C) The Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) with the assistance of Sri Lanka Air Force (SLAF) kfir jets sunk an alleged LTTE weapons supply ship approximately 120 nautical miles off the eastern coast of Kalmunai, south of Batticaloa, on the afternoon of September 17. That morning, the Sri Lanka Navy (SLN) ship Samudura (ex-US Coast Cutter Courageous) made initial contact with the vessel, which was sailing without a flag, did not answer radio hails, and returned warning fire. Security forces sunk the ship after an eight-hour battle, military spokesman Brigadier Prasad Samarasinghe told pol FSN, killing approximately 15 LTTE cadres. He claimed that "large quantities of weapons and ammunition, including artillery guns" sunk with the vessel.

Tigers Use Talks to Distract, Says GSL

12. (C) The Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) used the discovery of the LTTE weapons smuggling vessel to illustrate its point that the LTTE has used the ceasefire to strengthen militarily (ref C). Brigadier Samarasinghe told pol FSN on September 18: "The LTTE is trying to create a ceasefire to strengthen and procure arms for future attacks after suffering humiliating defeats against the security forces." Defense spokesman Keheliya Rambukwella told the independent Daily Mirror: "The LTTE has opted for peace talks every time it was weakened by the security forces. This instance proves clearly that the LTTE was buying time to procure arms and strengthen itself" while expressing readiness for peace talks. Rambukwella added that the GSL would seek to amend the 2002 Ceasefire Agreement (CFA) to prevent the LTTE from using sea routes to rearm itself. An LTTE spokesperson told

BBC on September 16 that the LTTE would not attend talks unless GSL security forces withdraw from Sampur, south of Trincomalee harbor. (Note: Security forces gained control of Sampur on September 6, from which the LTTE had fired periodically on Trincomalee harbor. The CFA did not clearly define Sampur as LTTE or government-controlled. Ref B.)

Civil Servants and Muslims Killed

¶3. (C) Meanwhile on September 17, suspected LTTE cadres fired on a vehicle carrying three employees of the GSL Ceylon Electricity Board (CEB) north of a Sri Lanka Army (SLA) checkpoint in Jaffna. One passenger died. LTTE cadres detonated a roadside bomb against security forces on foot patrol near Trincomalee, although no soldiers were killed. On the morning of September 18, 11 Muslims were found reportedly "hacked to death by machete" in the eastern coastal Ampara district, five kilometers south of the USAID-funded Arugam Bay bridge, military spokesman Prasad Samarasinghe told pol FSN. Military and police sources blamed the LTTE for the murders and told us that the men had been renovating an irrigation sluice gate under the supervision of a Muslim contractor. A USAID contractor in Arugam Bay added that as many as four Sinhalese had been killed along with the Muslims, speculating that the killings may be linked to a cemetery dispute between Muslim and Sinhalese communities in the area.

Comment

¶4. (C) Comment: The Government remains fully committed to a ceasefire and peace talks as they reaffirmed to the Norwegians

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(septel). But incidents such as these add to the pressure on the Government to take a tougher stance. The GSL is likely to exercise restraint, at least while the President is at UNGA, if not longer, which gives Norway a window to seek an LTTE commitment to the ceasefire. End Comment.

BLAKE